

# HOUSING

## WHY HOUSING MATTERS

It seems that every day reveals another news story that demonstrates the fundamental importance of our homes.

It's an issue that affects all but the very rich and worries different generations. As ever, "home ownership" (a.k.a. "massive indebtedness") grabs the headlines, notably when Government and the Bank of England seem to have nothing to offer but more misery as they raise interest rates.

As we go to press, Londoners are finding that landlords are protecting themselves by demanding that tenants have incomes of well over £30k to ensure they can pay the sky-high rents.

This is, of course, on top of still exorbitant energy costs. If offering hope for housing isn't a key task for a Labour Government, what is?

### EVICTIONS!

It's not just wildfires driving people out of their homes – "no fault" evictions have pushed 104,510 households into temporary accommodation, the highest figure since records began. The main cause of homelessness is the loss of a private tenancy, while councils' ability to offer support has been cut by the Government freezing Local Housing Allowance.

We agree with Shelter's Chief Executive who said that the time for empty words on building social homes and ending no-fault evictions has long passed.

When Parliament resumes, the Renters (Reform) Bill needs to be made law at the earliest opportunity.

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Rishi Sunak has granted 100 new North Sea oil and gas extraction licences.

He may be taking the opportunity presented by the controversy over the London Ultra-Low Emissions Zone to betray Britain's climate change pledges, which could include cutting emissions from homes.

Friends of the Earth said Sunak's decision is "*pouring more fuel on the flames*" of the unprecedented wildfires and heatwaves across the globe.

Former Tory Minister Zac Goldsmith said the UK had '*stepped off the world stage and withdrawn our leadership on climate and nature*'.

Labour's Shadow Energy Secretary, Ed Miliband, called this a "*devastating indictment of Rishi Sunak and his whole government on climate and nature*".

# REPORTING THE NATIONAL POLICY FORUM

We are keen to keep LHG members informed about how our contribution fared at the debate at the Labour Party's National Policy Forum, but readers will see that it has been a process that at times is frustrating.

On the opposite page you will see our Secretary, Sheila Spencer's, detailed account.

In due course, the Labour Party will show how the decisions of the recent NPF meeting have influenced the drafting of the Party's General Election manifesto.

To fill in gaps while we wait, we provide an extract from the latest report by Ann Black, veteran member of Labour's National Executive Committee. This reflects how the housing-related issues were handled by the NPF.

*I should add that this extract is not an official report and not all the views expressed are necessarily those of the Labour Housing Group.*



Paul Martin (Editor)

“ The public health document now includes a commitment to ensure that everyone can afford a healthy diet and has opportunities for exercise... In addition Labour would work across departments to tackle health problems related to poverty, including cold, damp, mouldy and overcrowded housing conditions.

## A House is not a Home

Housing itself was more difficult, and many members had commented on the sparse nature of the section on private rented housing.



A proposed *renters' charter* would give new protection against unfair fees, harassment and extortionate within-tenancy rent increases, and introduce a right to have pets.

However any form of rent control was off the agenda amid fears that restrictions would lead to a mass exodus of landlords, and that included any reference to unaffordability, or the drain on the housing benefit budget.

I managed to get two minor changes: first, to add the underlined words:

“The lack of certainty and security and the high costs that are now inherent to renting privately takes an immense toll on private tenants, including more than one million families with children.”

and second, to change “*the private sector will remain the tenure of choice for many families*” to “*many people will continue to live in the private rented sector*” As my seconder pointed out, the private sector is often the *tenure of no alternative* rather than the *tenure of choice*, and I am still concerned that the paper does not fully understand the position of younger people without access to a Bank of Mum and Dad.

”

# DISAPPOINTMENT AT NPF

LHG has spent some time in the last year contributing to the discussions about what should go into the next manifesto. We reported to you in the March 2023 newsletter what we submitted to the National Policy Forum on your behalf.

For the NPF's deliberations held in July, the Executive Committee had proposed 3 additions to the text circulated which delegates agreed to support at the NPF meeting in Nottingham:

**1. Housing as a human right:**

Labour will consult on the best way to introduce a right to adequate housing in order to embed a long-term commitment to ensuring decent and affordable homes.

**2. Supporting existing housing stock**

Labour will provide a fair deal for the residents of 4m council homes, by supporting councils to make their homes safe, damp-free and energy efficient.

**3. Housing support for survivors of domestic abuse**

Labour will support survivors of domestic abuse through measures to increase access to support and to safe accommodation

We had also asked NPF delegates to consider submitting the amendments below, but we did not manage to get pledges of support for these points, though they may nonetheless have been taken up by delegates:

**4. Building council housing**

Whilst acknowledging the challenges of finance, land, skills and materials we should aspire to be building the 90,000 social rent homes per year that housing experts agree we need in order to tackle the housing crisis by the end of our first term.

**5. Bedroom Tax and Benefit Cap**

.... we will repeal the legislation which introduced the punitive "Bedroom Tax" and remove the Benefit Cap.

**6. Rural issues**

Adding the words in red to this paragraph: *We will allow Town and Parish councils to pioneer new models of local development for smaller sites, as part of their role in securing more genuinely affordable houses, including council houses, in every town and village. This*

*combined with a national programme to build highly energy capable homes, reforms to the planning system, compulsory land purchase and the role of Homes England will ensure a safe, warm and secure home for people in towns, villages, and cities.*

The extract from Ann Black's report of the NPF meeting (shown opposite) hints that the housing debate was limited in its breadth.

At the date of writing, we don't have a full picture of what happened in other policy areas such as the Private Rented Sector, but the indications are that the right to adequate housing will be only be mentioned without a pledge to consult on bringing the right into English law.

Sheila Spencer said "*Whilst LHG will be disappointed if this is the case, we will continue to campaign for the right to adequate housing to be incorporated into English legislation (as it is likely to be in Wales and Scotland – see page 5).*

*In addition, the welfare benefits changes we thought critical – ending the limitation of child benefit to 2 children, scrapping the Bedroom Tax and restoring the cuts in local housing allowances – did not get through.*

*Again, LHG will continue to campaign for benefit reforms which we believe would significantly reduce homelessness as well as child poverty."*



Sheila Spencer  
(LHG Secretary)

# LHG FRINGE MEETINGS IN LIVERPOOL

**LHG is holding two fringe meetings at Annual Conference this year.**

We are grateful for the offer of sponsorship for the first of those meetings from EDAROTH, an affordable housing developer which believes that everyone deserves a roof over their head and champions social housing. This sponsorship means that we are holding the event within the secure zone, so delegates and visitors will not have far to go!

In addition, a donation from an LHG member is supporting the second meeting, to take place not far away, on Mann Island just to the north of the Conference Centre.

## **1. Campaigning on housing as a winning issue**

**Date/time:** Monday October 9th 7.30-9.00pm

**Venue:** The Exchange Restaurant, Hilton Hotel, 3 Thomas Steers Way, Liverpool L1 8LW

***Drinks and small snacks will be available from 7pm.***

The theme follows our Conference motion, focusing on the imperative of making sure that the voting public knows what our housing policies are and what difference these policies will make for them.

**Speakers:** Lisa Nandy MP and Mayor Andy Burnham (invited), Paula Barker MP, Cllr Rachel Blake, Cllr Elsie Blundell and Ben Marshall from Ipsos Mori. Also contributing will be Mark Powell, Managing Director, EDAROTH.

**Chair:** Cllr John Cotton (Leader of Birmingham City Council)

## **2. Making ends meet through retrofitting our homes**

**Date/time:** Tuesday 10th October 6.30pm-8.00pm

**Venue:** Avenue HQ, 17 Mann Island, Liverpool, L3 1BP.

*Refreshments served from 6.15pm.*

The net zero challenge is particularly crucial for housing across all sectors. We need developers, builders, landlords, home owners, and tenants to be on board, as well as funders. And we desperately need to make our homes more energy efficient so that money goes further, particularly for those at the lower income levels and for those who need more warmth to support disabilities and ill health.

We will be asking how Labour should ensure that energy efficiency measures help to make our housing sustainable and costs lower, and what impact net zero will really have on the cost of living of those in greatest need.

**Speakers:** Ed Miliband MP (invited), Emma Hoddinott, The Co-operative Party, Rhys Moore, National Housing Federation, Brian Robson, Northern Housing Consortium, and Ben Powell from Hough Bellis

**Chair:** Cllr Ross Houston (Deputy Leader Barnet Council)



# HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

## *KEEPING UP THE PRESSURE*

Labour Housing Group's Secretary, Sheila Spencer and Steve Cockburn of the Labour Campaign for Human Rights (LCHR) have been briefing members of Labour's National Policy Forum on the case for housing being treated as a fundamental human right.

**The policy is widely welcomed within the Party and elsewhere.**

- Keir Starmer argued during Labour's leadership contest that "We have to start treating housing as a fundamental human right"
- Labour's 2021 Party Conference unanimously agreed Labour should incorporate a right to adequate housing into law<sup>1</sup> and Lucy Powell, then Shadow Housing Secretary, said that "housing as a human right [will be] at the heart of our New Settlement."
- In 2022, her successor, Lisa Nandy said that "housing is not a market, it is a fundamental human right".
- Most recently, Gordon Brown's Commission<sup>2</sup> on the UK's Future recommended that the right to adequate housing be included as a legally binding commitment.

**Wider support**

- Most recently, Gordon Brown's Commission<sup>2</sup> on the UK's Future recommended that the right to adequate housing be included as a legally binding commitment.

**What are the benefits?**

1. It provides a long-term vision in which Labour can show how everyone has the right to a secure, affordable and decent home for themselves and their family and put an end to homelessness.
2. Offering progressive and inclusive policies will ensure that the needs of marginalised and often-neglected groups are not overlooked.

3. It will help to establish systems of scrutiny and oversight, including accountability to Parliament as to how the right to adequate housing will be progressively realised.
4. Signposting mechanisms whereby individuals and groups could challenge violations and seek remedy.

**Can Britain afford it?**

International law would require government to progressively realise the human right to housing according to the resources available, rather than create an immediate obligation to provide homes for all. However, it should influence government decisions on future investment.

**Good examples**

The UK will be able to draw on the experience of countries such as Canada (through its National Housing Strategy Act) and Spain. Finland's role as a pioneer of Housing First and its constitutional protections for economic and social rights are also relevant.

**How can it be done in the UK?**

**Labour should aim to introduce a right to housing as part of its first Housing bill.**

This should be drafted in a way that provides a clear framework of rights while protecting the primacy of Parliament and local authorities. (The Human Rights Act is a good example.)

For more info contact Steve Cockburn at LCHR - [stcockburn08@gmail.com](mailto:stcockburn08@gmail.com)

*Steve Cockburn is a leader in human rights and international development, an expert in research, advocacy and campaigns, and an LHG member. He currently heads up Amnesty's global work on economic and social rights, leading their work on health, education, housing and workers' rights.*

1. Conference motions <https://labourlist.org/2021/10/labour-conference-2021-the-content-of-every-policy-motion-and-how-it-passed/>
2. Gordon Brown's Commission on the UK's Future [Commission-on-the-UKs-Future.pdf](#)
3. [The Co-operation Agreement: 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)
4. [Labour's National Recovery Plan, April 2021, p95. Scottish-Labours-National-Recovery-Plan.pdf \(scottishlabour.org.uk\)](#)
5. [Housing is a Human Right: new publication from LHG and LCHR – Labour Housing Group 6 Compassion in Politics, November 2022, Cost of living report \(nationbuilder.com\)](#)
6. International standards, defined by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights include affordability, availability of services, accessibility, security of tenure, habitability, cultural adequacy and location.
7. [The right to adequate housing in Wales: Feasibility report - Shelter Cymru](#)

# AUTUMN POLICY DAY

Our Autumn Policy Day will take place in the East of England on 16th September with a focus on rural housing.

The venue will be the Queensgate Hotel, 5-7 Fletton Ave, Peterborough, PE2 8AX.



We are working with Labour Coast and Country to make this an interesting and informative event.

*It will be a "hybrid" meeting, with attendance either in-person at the venue, or on Zoom.*

The issues faced by those seeking to live in rural ("sparsely-populated") areas do not necessarily differ from those living in towns, but their context and severity may well do so. Some of the issues that are more frequently mentioned include:-

- a lack of truly affordable rented homes
- insufficient family-sized homes
- a lack of suitable sites /planning permission
- higher costs of building and maintenance
- older homes in need of refurbishment

**Baroness Sue Hayman** will be talking about the Co-op Party's Rural Commission report. She is Labour's Shadow Spokesperson on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/Leveling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government.

**Jo Lavis** is a Rural Housing consultant.

**Laura Atkinson** is a Rural Housing Enabler in Essex.

**Dr Nik Johnson**, Mayor for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

**Cllr Amanda Serjeant**, Chesterfield Borough Council

**Alex Mayer**, Labour Coast & Country.

**We want to hear from you if you have experience of housing in a rural area and**

**the sorts of issues that you have encountered in trying to meet rural housing need.**

Examples of successful building/renovations of genuinely affordable housing would be especially welcome.

Paul Martin (Policy Officer)

[pauljmartin@clara.co.uk](mailto:pauljmartin@clara.co.uk)

## L&Q FAILS RESIDENTS

The Housing Ombudsman has released its special investigation report into L&Q.

The housing association – one of the largest in the UK – was found guilty of severe maladministration more than twice as often as the national average.

The examples included poor repair services and mishandling of charges for leaseholders.



Additionally, there were failures of support for residents experiencing anti-social behaviour.

The report shows reasons for concern not only in respect of mistakes but how complaints were handled – *"Complaint responses demonstrated little empathy and in some cases being overtly dismissive, heavy-handed and lacking respect"*.

Where compensation was due *"there were repeated examples of the landlord not awarding compensation in a fair, reasonable or consistent way."*

*L&Q failed to consistently identify damp and mould as the root cause of many of its disrepair case.*

*The landlord did not follow its own anti-social behaviour policy and, as reports were not acted on, vulnerable residents were exposed to ASB for a prolonged period of time.*

Read the Ombudsman's full report [here](#).

# JOHN LEWIS PARTNERSHIP TURNS LANDLORD IN BROMLEY



**The well-known retailer, John Lewis Partnership (JLP) has announced plans to build 10,000 homes for rent by 2030 about half of which will be built on its own property estate.**

It wants to generate 40% of profits from non-retail ventures due to falling profits from its retail sales. The first developments will be in Bromley for 353 homes over its store and 428 in West Ealing. Plans have recently been lodged with local councils.

Nina Bhatia, the director of strategy at JLP, said: "The market for rental is growing and we have a shortage of housing.

"This [housing] will appeal to the core John Lewis and Waitrose demographic who are young and moving into becoming families seeking flexible, attractive accommodation that will give them what they need for every stage of their lives."

She said John Lewis was aiming to create rental homes that offered something "distinctive" compared to existing landlords with the ability to personalise properties and with long-term tenure options and significantly reduced upfront fees to give residents greater flexibility and security.

"This is not just about the financial return but creating a community with housing and community space and the opportunity to be a resident somewhere that is more than just four walls," Bhatia said.

The market rents will have to cover the costs such as repaying the capital loan of £500 million, a gym, roof gardens, meeting rooms, green places, energy efficiency measures and optional John Lewis furniture.

The group is aiming for 35% of the homes to be classed as affordable, despite warning in Bromley that only 20% affordable homes could be guaranteed without additional funding. Industry insiders have expressed scepticism that the target is commercially viable.

It remains to be seen whether JLP have the expertise to deliver on this development programme. A press release refers to "significantly reduced upfront fees to give residents greater flexibility and security". *These have been banned by the Tenant Fees Act 2019.*



Other supermarkets have built residential property on land that they own. However, these have been flats for sale and not to rent.

Informal consultation has taken place with Bromley residents. Concern has been expressed by a local LibDem Councillor about the height of the building. One Tower is 27 storeys high and another is 19 storeys. She has already announced that she will vote against the planning application.

Tory councillors are not keen on high buildings either. A nearby building is currently the tallest building in Bromley at 17 storeys high.

Bromley residents in housing need will not benefit from this development though new housing is welcomed.

The local council intends to build 1000 council houses over the next four years to reduce their expenditure on temporary accommodation.

The council would do well to consider building high. Hopefully a future Labour Government would be stricter on the affordability criteria.

Dermot McKibbin, Beckenham CLP

# BRANCHING OUT

**LHG's Executive is keen to involve supporters all over the country with the aim of establishing a members' network.**

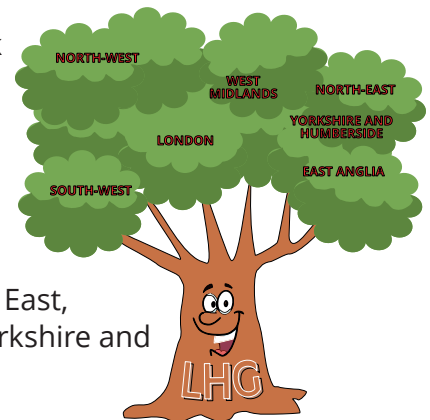
They will aim to recruit ten or more members to become a recognised LHG Branch which will elect Officers at an Annual General Meeting.

Branches will be encouraged to report regularly to the Executive on their activities and concerns and may seek funding from the Executive to support approved initiatives.

**Labour Housing Group's July Executive meeting appointed Paul Martin to liaise with LHG Branches, following on from the work done by Rachel Blake who is now Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the *Cities of London* constituency.**



The aim is to involve more members around the country and improve communications between activists. Currently, we have branches in East of England, London, North East, North West, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside.



Although LHG rules call for ten individual members to form a branch, this will take time and energy to develop in many areas of the country. Meanwhile, we still need to share information and ideas about how to tackle the urgent and varied housing problems that we all encounter.

Paul said "I would like to hear from anyone keen on starting a local branch to find out what support they need to get going and the issues members would like to discuss. I plan to start a regular cycle of communication. Obviously, this will be heavily influenced by the timing of elections, local and national.

One of the things LHG is planning to provide is a "crib-sheet" about housing issues to help Labour's doorstep canvassers.

[pauljmartin@clara.co.uk](mailto:pauljmartin@clara.co.uk)

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## BUILDING SUPPORT AMONG FUTURE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

**41**  
APPLICATIONS

In 2022, the LHG Executive was looking for ways to boost support for housing issues among potential elected representatives. As a Socialist Society, we are able to offer endorsement to those Labour members who support our aims.



This began with the adoption of a simple pledge which candidates would be asked to support. It was agreed that they should have been an LHG member for 15 months.

41 individuals have so far sought LHG's endorsement for Parliamentary selections; 9 of these were endorsed, most of whom have been successful in being selected as PPCs.

LHG Executive reviewed the endorsement policy at their July meeting, and agreed to reduce the qualifying period to 6 months. You can find more about the policy [here](#).



# RETROFITTING

## A COLLECTIVE MATTER

LHG's fringe meeting at Labour Party Conference is set to tackle the vital but thorny issue of "retrofitting" – making old buildings fit for the demands of today. The high-profile demand is how to respond to climate change while still meeting the needs of their inhabitants.

Climate change is fundamentally a collective issue, namely, the future of our shared planet. It demands that we work together to find solutions.

Unfortunately, this is at odds with the common idea that making homes energy-efficient is largely a matter for individual householders. Most of us will not manage the massive changes needed alone and unaided.

The UK housing stock is old by international standards. Many homes were built in the 19th and early 20th centuries and although they may be seen as desirable, they are not easily or cheaply made energy-efficient.

*This fact has, of course, been highlighted by the massive increase in energy costs.*

Good government should be looking to tackle these issues together, yet most of the well-publicised "initiatives" are based on the idea that individuals will drive change and the market will respond.

**Sadly, neither is likely to provide the vision or practical solutions without political leadership.**

- We need national action to provide technical and legal ways to tackle, say, multi-storey blocks. (Think: Grenfell.)
- We will also need effective ways to, say, modernise a Victorian terrace with multiple owners in varying states of dilapidation. (Think: urban renewal.)
- We will need new systems of grants and imaginative ways to provide affordable loans.
- We will need council officials to make it happen "on the ground"

**Sounds like a job for Labour, at national and local level.**

## WHAT IS THE LABOUR HOUSING GROUP?

The Labour Housing Group is a lobbying group that is affiliated to the Labour Party and dedicated to the development of a socialist housing policy.

You can contact us at <http://labourhousing.org/contact> and join us at <https://labourhousing.org/membership/>

Individuals must be members of the Labour Party and agree to be bound by Labour Party rules and the LHG constitution.

## YOU CAN \$TILL HE£P

If you are too busy to give time and energy, you can still help us in our work by making a donation by bank transfer to:

**"Labour Housing Group"**

Account number 50478080,  
Sort code 08-90-06

Co-operative Bank,  
PO Box 1AN, Blandford Street,  
Newcastle, NE99 1AN.

Of course, you can also send a cheque made payable to "Labour Housing Group" c/o **The Treasurer, Flat 2, 8 Torrington Park, London N12 9SS**

**Additionally, this "QR" code shows LHG's bank details on your phone.**



*Opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Labour Housing Group.*